

Sunshine by unicornsandbutane

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Summary:

Steve misses being in love, and Billy misses California.

Sunshine

Author's Note:

- For [ToAStranger](#).

They're not even friends. They have, or had, some of the same friends, but they've never in memory shared a conversation that wasn't colored by antagonism. Still, even Billy can see that something is different. Steve Harrington went through something that night after Max pulled that stunt with the syringe full of god-knows-what and stole Billy's car. She'd never told him she did it, by the way, but he knows, after she threatened to castrate him with a bat, she was the only one of the rugrats with enough balls to do it. Billy didn't even think Harrington would've done it, stolen the car that is, had he been conscious. Steve Harrington, from the sounds of Max talking to her dweeb friends whenever Billy is forced to listen to them in his house, his car, at the damn arcade, seems to have fallen into the role of 'angel on Max's shoulder'. The kids are always saying stuff like "don't tell Steve, but..." or, "Steve wouldn't be happy if..." or "come on, guys, Steve said..." and Billy tries to tune it out. He wonders if he's the devil on Max's other shoulder, leading her to do stuff like swing a bat full of nails between her step brother's legs, or if that's all her. He's not sure the Steve-shaped figure in her conscience would have dissuaded her from doing that. Maybe, but maybe not. Probably not. Not after what Billy did to him that night.

So they're not friends, Billy and Harrington. But Harrington has had this haunted look for a while that makes it less fun to mess with him. And plus, now Max has this smug look at home that says 'I could totally waste you if I wanted,' which first, is not at all fair coming from girl not even old enough to see Red Dawn without him serving as her guardian, and second, isn't really the kind of vibe he needs at home. But if he roughed Harrington up again, he gets the feeling Max would try something. And he doesn't want to go home, not to her and not to Neil, so he's hanging around the gym after school, just, shooting hoops and whatever, and Harrington comes in and starts using the other side of the court, practicing free-throws (god knows he needs it) and he didn't say anything to Billy when he came in, so

for a while, Billy doesn't say anything to him. It's just the sound of their shoes squeaking on the floor, the ball hitting the backboard, the rim, swishing through the hoop and bouncing off of the court again.

Billy doesn't want to be the first to break the silence. Now, it's become a competition: who is strong enough to ignore the other one longer? He has this crawly feeling under his skin, like somehow, Harrington has an aura around him, some kinda tangible thing, and it's all up in Billy's space. Billy was here first, damn it. He pauses for a moment, and hears Harrington dribbling, slow, slower than you'd ever get in a game.

"What's it like in California?"

Okay so, maybe Billy was the only one who thought they were competing to ignore each other, and now he feels stupid. Harrington isn't looking at him. He's still dribbling at that ponderous pace, looking at the hoop.

What kind of question is that, for someone you're not friends with?

"What do you mean, what's it like?" Billy retorts, to buy himself time, thinking about Steve Harrington asking him about /home/.

"I dunno, I just wondered."

"Why don't you ask Max?" Billy takes a shot, trying for a lay-up, but misses. He trots after the ball.

"I'm asking /you/, criminy. Does it have to be so difficult?" Harrington turns around, faces Billy, but Billy doesn't look at him directly. He stands there like a fucking idiot instead, staring at the sea of bleachers and imagining the vast Pacific Ocean instead.

"I dunno if you'd like it," he says. "You're probably used to all these trees and cows and shit." He thinks for a moment. "I take that back, there's trees up north. Biggest trees in the whole world, y'know, and there's cows and fields and whatever else you got in this hick town, in the middle part of the state. California's got everything."

"You're really selling it," Harrington drawls. "I didn't know you worked for the department of tourism."

Billy looks at him. "You ever been outside of shit-reeking Indiana, Harrington? You ever seen a god damn palm tree?" He chucks his ball in Harrington's direction. Harrington has to drop the ball he's been dribbling sedately to catch it.

"Can't say that I have," he says, spinning the ball in his hands.

Billy scoffs. "California is like..." He thinks about it, feels it all come rushing back. "You ever wanna feel like a movie star? Maybe you already did, 'King Steve', but you just don't know what..." He struggles for a second, trying to find the words, wipes his hands on his shirt. "You wanna drive down PCH, windows down, the smell of salt and sunscreen whipping past your face, and have girls in bikinis and roller skates tilt their shades down to look at you? You wanna feel like you're walking through a god damn postcard just going to work? That's what it's like." He raises his eyebrows at Harrington who is making an unreadable face, almost like he can't really picture it. "Wheeler's pretty cute, Harrington, but imagine she has a bunch of smokin' hot friends and they all walk around in swimsuits from May to September. You wanna feel the sun shining on your face like some kinda higher power is looking down on you, like you're important in a crowd?" The girls in swimsuits is only a small exaggeration. He might be multiplying the volume of beach bunnies hanging around, but Harrington doesn't have to know that. He aches, missing it, missing /home/, missing what life was like before everything happened that brought him to fucking /Hawkins/.

"That's what it's like, huh?" Harrington braces the ball against his side.

"That's what LA is like, the best parts. I can't speak for the rest of the state. It's a fuckin' big place, and I only went to NorCal as a kid."

Harrington nods. "You miss it a lot," he says. It's not a question. Billy looks to the side. "You leave a lot of friends behind or something? Some suntanned beach babe with eyes only for you?"

Billy smiles at nothing. He's not sure why he does it. He's still not looking at Harrington. He shakes his head.

"Do I seem like a one-woman man, Harrington?"

Harrington gives him a look. It's the kind of look Billy imagines the kids picture whenever they say something like "Steve'll be mad if..." and it's not like he even looks /mad/, just... disappointed? Like he's somebody's mother. Billy wants a cigarette.

"You've never had good Mexican food," Billy says. "I'm telling you this, but you'll have no concept of what I mean, not until you've been someplace that actually knows what barbacoa is. Actually, other than pie and coffee, I'm not sure you know what food is."

"Real nice," Harrington says, flinging the ball back to Billy, who catches it. The smack of the dimpled rubber feels good against his hands. He dribbles back and forth, between his legs, starts showing off. Harrington rolls his eyes.

"What," Billy says, feeling more himself ragging on Harrington, "I said this podunk town had good pie. What kind you like, Harrington? Cherry pie? You like a good cherry pie King Steve?" He feints toward Harrington, but hangs back. "Wheeler make you a good cherry pie? Hot and sweet?" He sticks his tongue out as Harrington's expression sours. "Her mom sure looks like she's got a good pie. Got a good taste of her cookies you know—"

Harrington rushes him, snags the ball, jumps up to make a basket. He throws the ball hard and fast at Billy, and he catches it just short of hitting him in his face.

"Relax, Harrington, shit," he chastises, tossing the ball hand to hand. "I'm not moving in on your girl. Or her daddy's girl."

"She's not my girl," Harrington grits out.

"No foolin'?" Billy asks, slightly surprised. "I thought all that stuff about her and Byers was bullshit."

He passes the ball to Harrington underhand, lets him dribble for a while. "It's not, I guess." He watches his hands. "She said /we/ were bullshit, actually. Her and me."

"Well there's no accounting for taste I guess," Billy comments. "Don't let it get your panties in a twist, Harrington. You've got a Beemer and

a much better haircut than that guy. You'll bounce back."

"Everyone always comments on my hair," Harrington murmurs, and it's so befuddled, Billy laughs.

"I'm serious. Byers looks like he got the same bowl cut as his kid brother, five years ago, and never cut his hair again in memoriam to that which he lost." He places his hand on his chest, in mock solemnity.

"Cut it out, Jonathan is a good guy," Harrington protests, but Billy can see he's trying to hide a smile.

"Right, and I'm sure Cousin Itt on his forehead is great company too."

Harrington snorts, passes the ball back to Billy, who goes for a shot from the free-throw line. It bounces off the rim once, but makes it into the basket. Harrington retrieves it, jumps to shoot, makes a backboard shot. Billy raises his eyebrows at him. Harrington bounces the ball over to him.

"You and Jonathan have a lot in common," Harrington accuses lightly. "He also beat my face in, once."

Billy tries to spin the ball on his finger, but can't really manage it. "Seems to be a rite of passage around here. Soon people are gonna be lining up to hit you in the teeth. You ever think about moving?"

"Why do you think I asked you about California?"

Billy smirks at him, chucks the ball over his shoulder. "Wait 'til you try an In-N-Out burger." He starts walking toward the gym doors, uncaring of putting the balls away.

"Is that another sex joke?" Harrington asks, for some reason, following him.

"On the right day, an In-N-Out burger could be better than sex."

"Shut up," Harrington gripes, but he keeps pace with Billy to the locker rooms. They change in different rows, their lockers set apart from each other, but catch up with one another on their way out to

the parking lot. Most everyone else is gone, so their cars are easy to spot. They hesitate a moment, not going for their keys, not hurrying to go home.

“You ever been to the lake?” Harrington asks.

“What, /Lovers’ Lake/?” Billy replies, with sarcastic emphasis. “Can’t say I’ve ever gone there to take in the /scenery/.”

Harrington ignores the implication, gestures in the vague direction of the lake. “There’s a little beach there, if you’re feeling homesick. Or you could just throw rocks at the water if that’s more your speed.”

“How ‘bout you swim out to that diving platform and I throw rocks at you?”

“You couldn’t hit me in a thousand years,” Harrington draws. “You’re decent at basketball, but your baseball game is for shit.”

“Them’s fightin’ words, Harrington,” Billy warns. “You’d better watch your back.”

“You’re cordially invited to prove me wrong, Hargrove.”

“I’ll meet you at the lake, pretty boy. Then we’ll see what’s what.” He starts heading for his car, walking backwards to stare Harrington down until he starts walking toward his BMW. Billy revs his engine in challenge, and peels out of the lot to tear down the road towards the lake.

So they’re not friends, but something is different. Billy shrugs it off, and makes the turn for Lovers’ Lake.

Author's Note:

So I had a bet with ToAStranger over which one of us has lived in more places (we have both moved around a lot), and I lost, so I wrote a ficlet.